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THE
CROSS of CHRIST,

CONSIDERED IN A
LETTER,

ADDRESSED TO
CHRISTIANS of all DENOMINATIONS.

By JOHN ^KFAWCETT, A.M.

SOLD by the AUTHOR:

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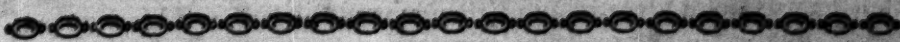
BY JOHN T. ...

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The CROSS of CHRIST, &c.

DEAR BRETHREN,

THE refined system of religion, which is at this day adopted by many, is unsuitable to the case of anxious guilty criminals. It is insufficient to give substantial peace to a wounded conscience; insufficient to furnish a proper reply to that most important of all inquiries, What must I do to be saved?

But the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is richly adapted to answer all these purposes. It directs us to the death of the divine Saviour in our room and stead, as the sovereign remedy for all the evils which sin has introduced. The cross of Christ is the grand source of relief, which it proposes to our consideration. It is this which distinguishes the religion of Jesus from every other religion professed in the world.

It may be needful just to observe, before we proceed, that the Redeemer of men suffered death on a sort of gibbet called a cross.—With the Greeks, the Romans, and some other nations, this was a punishment inflicted on the vilest slaves, who had been guilty of notorious offences. It was shameful, painful and lingering. The criminal was first scourged with cords. These cords had frequently sharp pointed bones fixed to their ends. The sufferer must then bear his cross to the place of execution. There, his clothes being stripped off, his body was stretched upon the timber, his hands nailed to the cross beam, and his feet to the lower part. The cross was then raised, and fixed in the ground, the nails driven through the most sensible parts of the body, and sustaining its weight, rendered the pain

exquisite beyond expression. Yet it was sometimes two or three days before the person expired. The legs of the two thieves crucified with our Redeemer, were broken, to hasten their end, for a reason assigned by the Jews. When they came to Jesus, they found that he was dead already, and they marvelled at it. This was probably owing to the overwhelming sorrows of his holy soul, the weight of human guilt, and the insupportable strokes of avenging justice. He was oppressed and afflicted in a manner that cannot be described. Hence his most piercing outcry, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me !

By the cross of Christ we understand, not the timber to which he was nailed, and on which he expired, but his crucifixion upon it ; the death which he died for sinners. The publication of this is called the preaching of the cross, 1 Cor. i. 18. To suffer persecution for maintaining this doctrine, is to suffer persecution for the cross of Christ ; and to glory in salvation by Jesus, is to glory in his cross. Gal. vi. 12, 14.

This then is the subject we are a little to consider. A subject too wonderful, and too copious for our feeble powers. All we can say, and especially in so narrow a compass, will fall far beneath the dignity and sublimity of it. We shall only remind you, with simplicity and plainness, that the cross of Christ is the fulfilment of divine purposes and predictions—the sum of the gospel—the salvation of sinners—the conquest of all enemies—the foundation of hope—the ground of triumph—the display of the divine perfections—and the grand incentive to holiness.

1. The cross of Christ is the fulfilment of divine purposes, prophecies and promises. The thoughts and counsels of the God of all grace were, from everlasting, employed on the grand design, which was accomplished by the Redeemer's death. He is stiled the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The purposes of the Father in Christ Jesus our Lord, are said to be eternal. When he was delivered up to be crucified, it was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

What a series of prophecies, of visions, of types and of promises were accomplished in the cross of Christ ! In this great centre they all met. From *Moses to Malachi*, the spirit of God in all the prophets, testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. The oracles of Heaven, through succeeding generations, referred to the cross of Christ.

In this the Mosaic rites and ordinances, types and symbols had their accomplishment. If we consider them not in this light, what are they all, but pompous and unmeaning institutions, utterly unworthy the wisdom of their great Author. What significancy could there be in the shedding of so much blood, the slaughtering of so many

many innocent victims, the consuming of so much flesh, if the whole were not to teach us, that without the shedding of Jesus's blood, there could be no remission of sins for us? The constant sacrificing of so many inoffensive animals, pointed to the one great sacrifice which Jesus was to offer up without spot to God. Considered in this light, every institution of this kind, had its significancy. We are therefore taught, in the new testament, to understand them as shadows of good things to come, of which the body is Christ. The ambiguity of types vanished in his cross, when he appeared once in the end of the world, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Many of the most remarkable events, and many of the most distinguished personages mentioned in the old testament, were typical of the cross of Christ. We cannot be mistaken in this interpretation of them, since the inspired writers of the new testament teach us so to understand them. The priesthood of *Melchizedek*, and that of Aaron and his sons, prefigured the everlasting priesthood of the Son of God. The astonishing transaction of *Isaac's* being bound and laid on the altar by the hands of his father, is explained by the cross of Christ. It pleased the Lord to bruise him, he hath put him to grief, he made his soul an offering for sin.

The lifting up of the brazen serpent in the wilderness, for the healing of the expiring *Israelites*, was realized in the elevation of Jesus on the cross. So was the son of man lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Bread from heaven sustained the lives of the travellers from Egypt to Canaan; Jesus came down from heaven, and gave himself to be the life of the world. The rock was smitten to give drink to the thirsty tribes of the Lord; that rock was Christ smitten for us by the rod of justice, that we might be furnished from him with the waters of life and salvation. *Joshua* led the people of Israel into *Canaan*; Jesus brings us into the promised land of rest and felicity.

The prophets of God, rapt into future times, foretold the transactions of the Redeemer's life, the sorrows of his soul, the agonies of his death, and the glorious effects which were to ensue. In the early ages of the world, the faith of God's people was supported by that mysterious prediction, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. The Patriarchs were assured that in the promised seed all nations of the world should be blessed. *Job* knew that his Redeemer lived. *Jacob* in a divine ecstasy before his death delivered that wonderful oracle, That the sceptre should not depart from *Judah*, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until *Shiloh*, the prince of peace, should make his appearance; to whom the gathering of the people should be. To the beloved *Daniel*, the time was revealed more expressly, when Messiah should be cut off, to finish transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy.

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The circumstances attending the crucifixion of Jesus, are foretold by the psalmist, as if he had actually seen them. The agonies he should feel are described ; the cry he should utter on the cross is expressed ; the casting of lots for his garments, the piercing of his hands and his feet, and the vinegar and the gall given him to drink, are distinctly mentioned. Ps. xxii.

Sometimes the prophets represent Jesus as a sufferer ; and sometimes as a conqueror. Now they speak of his humiliation, then of his exaltation. They point him out as the star that was to come out of Jacob, and as the branch that was to spring out of the stem of Jesse. They describe him as the angel of the covenant ; and as the desire of all nations who should suddenly come into his temple. They hold him forth as a king who should reign in righteousness, extending his sway from shore to shore ; whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and of whose dominion there shall be no end. To us, they cry in a divine transport, To us the Child is born, to us the Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Yet, mysterious as it is, this is he of whom they speak in other places, as calling himself a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people ; as being hated without a cause ; as being despised and rejected of men ; led like a lamb to the slaughter ; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ; and cut off out of the land of the living. The cross of Christ explains, elucidates, and confirms all these predictions.

2. The cross of Christ is the sum of the gospel. What is the gospel but a message from heaven, of mercy, of peace and of salvation through the sufferings and death of the son of God ? Of gospel history, what is the sum ? Christ crucified. What do the four Evangelists relate ? They all for substance tell the same story ; and that story is rightly termed the gospel. It is the history of the cross. In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word is established. God has graciously given us four, all inspired by his Holy Spirit, to relate the birth, the life, the labours, the preaching, the miracles, the sufferings, and the death of Jesus. They tell us what he said, what he did, and what he endured ; from the powers of darkness, from the hands of men, and from the sword of justice. They inform us how he was, at last, condemned, and nailed to the tree, for the testimony which he bore to the truth, that he was the only begotten son of God, and that the same divine honours were due to him as to the Father.

The doctrine of the gospel is the doctrine of the cross. We preach Christ crucified. I determined, says one of the first of his messengers, inspired to bear his name before *Gentiles* and kings, and the children of Israel, I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. The death of Christ for our sins is the life of the gospel. All the lines of evangelical truth meet in this

one point. You cannot mention one individual branch of the sacred system, which stands unconnected with it. Our being chosen to eternal life, our regeneration, our calling, our justification, our adoption into the family of God, our sanctification, our perseverance in faith and holiness to eternal felicity, all have an immediate relation to the atonement of Christ. Take that foundation away, and the whole superstructure falls to the ground.

3. The cross of Christ is the salvation of sinners. The gospel is a system which glorifies God by doing good to men. A system in its aspect benign, and in its agency infinitely beneficial. It is not like a meteor, to dazzle us with a vain glitter: Not like a comet to terrify us with a formidable blaze, without affording us any solid advantage. It is richly stored with benefits of the most needful, the most important, and the most exalted kind; like the glorious sun in the heavens, diffusing beams of light, and life, and ineffable joy all around. By it all that believe are eventually brought to enjoy a much nobler, and more exalted state of existence, than that from which *Adam* fell, and which they lost in him.

The grand object held forth in the gospel is the salvation of man. The distinguishing character of him who effects this great work, is that of a Saviour, an Almighty Saviour; who came to deliver us from the wrath to come; to recover us from the abyss of sin and misery into which we were fallen, and to exalt us to the regions of endless felicity. This he effected, not barely by the heavenly doctrine which he taught, and the bright example which he set before us; but by the death which he died for our sins,

Mankind are represented in the scriptures of truth, as being in a lost and ruined condition. But Jesus came to save the lost, by bearing their sins in his own body on the tree; by being wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities; by suffering, the just for the unjust; that they might have healing by his stripes, and life by his death,

This enables us to account for all that is said in the scripture, concerning the dignity of the Redeemer's person. He was found in fashion as a man, but he thought it no robbery, thought it no more than what he might justly claim, to be equal with God. Though he was really and truly man, that he might be capable of suffering, and of dying; yet all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily in him. He and the Father are one in nature and perfections. If the Redeemer's death were not a proper atonement for sin, why was it necessary that God should be manifest in the flesh? Why was it necessary that he who redeems us, should be Immanuel, God with us, God in our nature? An angel from heaven might have taught us the will of our Maker, and given us a good example. Nay, a man like ourselves might have done both. The deity of Christ, and his atonement for sin,

sin, must stand or fall together. Hence those who deny the one, do also consistently enough, deny the other. It is the dignity of the Redeemer's person that gives efficacy and validity to his sacrifice.

Misery is the natural consequence of guilt. Death is the wages of sin; its proper and just reward. What then is it that saves us from impending ruin? No effort, no expedient of our own; but the remedy which God himself has provided. What is it that delivers us from going down to the pit of destruction, but the ransom found? Our blessed Lord told *Nicodemus*, that the end of his being lifted up upon the cross, was this, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish. Is it not then the cross of Christ that saves us from destruction? Is it not a crucified Jesus who delivers us from eternal misery? Who that seriously thinks of this can forbear to admire the wonderful expedient?

The cross of Christ reconciles us to God. It procures our peace with him. It appeases the wrath of our incensed Judge, as it is a full satisfaction for our crimes. Through this ample compensation, awful, offended justice smiles, as well-pleased with every one who believes in Jesus. He is emphatically styled our peace; having made peace by the blood of his cross. This is the import of that divine declaration, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Through his cross, we enjoy the favour of God which is better than life. His love is manifested to us through Christ Jesus our Lord.

The cross of Christ procures our spiritual life. We are raised from a death in trespasses and sins, in consequence of the Redeemer's death for us. The end of his dying for us, we are assured was, that we might live unto God; that divine life might be imparted to us from our living head. To this purpose is his own testimony, I am come that they might have life. Thus a sweet singer in our Israhel expresses the delightful truth;

Her noblest life my spirit draws
From his dear wounds and bleeding side.

In consequence of his dying for us, the life-giving spirit is bestowed, to impart unto us heavenly knowledge, evangelical repentance, living faith, holy love, and spiritual joy. Whatever we are as christians, we are that of God in Christ Jesus, and as the fruit of his death. He is made of God unto us, not only wisdom and righteousness, but sanctification. If we are quickened, it is together with Christ; if we are healed, it is by his stripes.

The cross of Christ procures our pardon and justification. There is no remission of sins but through the shedding of his blood. We are chargeable with crimes, almost without number; from the least
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of which nothing can free us, but the cross of Christ. This removes our transgressions from us, as far as the east is from the west. The blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin. Whosoever believeth in him shall receive the blessing of a free and full remission. Sin shall never rise up in judgment against him; it is done away, as though it had never been; nay, we are assured, it shall not even be remembered any more for ever.

The curse of that holy law which we had broken, is removed from us by the cross of Christ. If we have faith in the son of God, the law proclaims no words of terror against us: its awful penalty has been borne, its tremendous malediction has been endured; by him who espoused our cause, and undertook our recovery. What else can be the meaning of that most cheering declaration, Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us? There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus; they are justified freely by his blood; so justified, that nothing is laid to their charge; so justified as to stand complete in Christ; so justified as to be beheld without spot by the eyes of infinite purity. The righteousness of Jesus covers them; hides their nakedness, and all their deformity; and renders them righteous, even as he is righteous. Glorious privilege! What tongue can express, what heart conceive its value?

The cross of Christ opens the gates of paradise for our reception. As there is no escaping eternal destruction, so there is no enjoying the felicity of the heavenly state, but through the Saviour's cross. Contemplate, dear brethren, the bliss of the celestial inheritance; think how great, how permanent, how satisfying it will be; and remember, that all this is the gift of God to you, through Jesus Christ. If Israel is saved with an everlasting salvation, he is saved in the Lord. The saints who are now in glory, overcame by the blood of the Lamb; they washed their robes, and made them white in that cleansing fountain; therefore are they before the throne of God. Hence they say with one voice, Worthy art Thou to receive riches, and honour, and glory, and power; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.

But the blessings which hang clustering on the Saviour's cross, are so great, that they can never be told. Whatever is included in our salvation comes to us in this way. And therefore we add,

4. The cross of Christ is the conquest of our enemies. Captivity itself is led captive. The powers of darkness are overcome. Jesus has spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them on his cross. They may yet be permitted to distress us for a while, but the God of peace shall bruise Satan, and all his legions, under your feet shortly.

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Our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed. The decree is gone forth which shall never be reversed, sin shall not have dominion over you ; for ye are not under the law, but under grace. After the apostle *Paul* had been uttering that pathetic exclamation, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death, he immediately adds, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord ; a glorious prospect of complete victory opened to his view, which turned his mourning into joy.

The cross of Christ delivers us from this present evil world, with all its snares and vexations. The divine Redeemer died to accomplish this, among all his other achievements. In this view, the cross of Christ was endeared to the blessed apostle *Paul*, as that by which the world was crucified to him, and he unto the world.

Death the last foe of man, and the gloomy grave, the terror of all living, are overcome by the cross of Christ. Death's formidable appearance remains, but his sting is gone ; for when guilt was expiated, death was disarmed. The pardoned sinner therefore may boldly say, O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory ? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. The king of terrors is, by the cross of Christ, converted into a messenger of peace. Now it is gain to die. The grave is become a quiet resting place for our mouldering bones, till the great rising day.

5. The cross of Christ is the foundation of our hope. Some talk of a hope built on the review of a well-spent life. A certain indication of a want of self-knowledge. What hope can the enlightened, the anxious trembling sinner have on this ground ? A thousand miscarriages arise to his view. Were there no ground of hope but that of the deeds of the law, such a one must sink into despair. Nothing can be a sure ground of hope, but that which removes sin, that which takes away the curse, that which satisfies justice, that which procures peace with God, and constitutes a sure title to heaven. The cross of Christ, we have seen, answers all these purposes ; answers them effectually. And hence it becomes the one, the only foundation of hope. The hope which is built upon it is sure and steadfast, like an anchor of the soul. Jesus Christ is the believing sinner's hope, and none but he. Other foundation for this salutary purpose can no man lay. The disquieted conscience finds no relief but in the Saviour's complete atonement. The enlightened mind can derive no supporting confidence, but from this source. We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved.

6. The cross of Christ is the ground of our triumph. How should it be otherwise ? It answers every salutary purpose. It removes every evil, and ensures every good. The christian has not only hope towards God, but joy and consolation ; joy which rises, at times, to
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a holy triumph. But on what is it founded? The apostle furnishes us with an answer. We joy in God through Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom we have now received the atonement. He exemplifies this in his own happy experience. God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. This to me is the ground of the sublimest consolation, of the highest triumph, even of glorying. The atoning sacrifice of a crucified Saviour is all my boast. It is not only my constant support; it fills me with ineffable joy.

7. The cross of Christ gives us the brightest display of the divine perfections. It not only brings the most solid comfort to man, but the highest glory to God. We see, on this ground, that a just and holy God, though determined to display his mercy and unbounded grace, would do it only in such a way, as might eternally vindicate the honour of his law; might demonstrate the purity of his nature, and declare the inviolable faithfulness of his threatening word.

We conceive that the Most High is infinitely wise. His wisdom shines in all his works. But no where have we so striking a display of it, as in the cross of Christ. How wonderful was the contrivance which could harmonize in the salvation of men, the seemingly opposite claims of mercy and of justice! That could satisfy, that could exalt, and magnify both; causing mercy and truth to meet together, righteousness and peace to embrace each other! Had punishment been inflicted on the sinner in all its severity, the glory of mercy had been obscured. And on the other hand, had the sinner been pardoned without any penalties sustained by himself or his substitute, justice had been set aside, and, speaking after the manner of men, one essential attribute of Deity would have triumphed over another.

A God all mercy is a God unjust. But in the cross of Christ, mercy and justice are equally glorified. In this divine expedient therefore, God hath displayed infinite wisdom, or to use the language of inspiration, he hath abounded towards us, in all wisdom and prudence.

The apostle *Paul* tells us, that God set forth the blessed Jesus for a propitiation, through faith in his blood, with this express design, that he might declare his righteousness; might demonstrate that vindictive justice, whose essential character and principal office is to punish sin. Thus a holy God shews himself to be strictly and inviolably righteous, in the administration of his government, even while he is the justifier of the sinner that believeth in Jesus. In this method of dispensing grace, he secures the utmost reverence to his divine law, he declares his infinite abhorrence of sin, he strikes the deepest terror on every persevering sinner, at the same time that he lays a solid foundation for the highest hope in every penitent transgressor. The torments inflicted on condemned souls in the infernal regions, are
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not so awful a monument of the justice and holiness of a sin-hating God, as he has given us in the crucifixion of his beloved son.—For if the Lord spared not him, when guilt was not found in him, but only imputed to him, how much less shall he spare the stubborn offender himself, who obstinately persists in his rebellion? Nothing sets forth so much the horrid aggravations of sin, its execrable vileness and loathsomeness in the sight of God; nothing speaks such terror to the workers of iniquity, did they but lay it to heart, as the shameful, the bitter, the accursed death of the Prince of life for our offences.

The love, the grace and mercy of God are most illustriously displayed in the cross of Christ. Pardon, life and endless felicity granted to condemned criminals on any terms, must be wonderful, and give an astonishing display of divine mercy. But when the Father grants these through the wounds, the agonies, the death of his dear, his only begotten, his equal Son, he not only manifests his love, but *commends* it; he displays it in such a way as may justly inflame us with gratitude, and transport us with everlasting admiration. He shews it in its highest perfection. The blessings of salvation, invaluable in themselves, are unspeakably enhanced by the manner in which they are conferred. God so loved the world, loved it in such a way and to such a degree, as can only be expressed, only conceived by himself; he so loved it, that he gave his only begotten Son to tortures and death, even the death of the cross, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Sin hath reigned unto death; but God's free and unbounded grace, like a glorious and superior sovereign, in all her fulness, riches and splendor, reigns through the righteousness of Jesus to eternal life. A thousand worlds conferred on us would have been as nothing, in comparison with the grace which is displayed in the death of the Son of God for us. Herein is love indeed.

In a word; would we see the tremendous name of Jehovah written in the fairest lines; would we see all his adorable perfections shine forth with the greatest splendor, we must fix our attention on the Redeemer's cross.

We shall close these remarks with one observation more, and that is,

8. The cross of Christ is the grand incentive to holiness. The doctrine of complete salvation by the Redeemer's death, is far from being unfriendly to the interests of morality. That morality which is recommended in the sacred scriptures is ingrafted on evangelical principles, and produced by the constraining love of a dying Redeemer. If we wish you, dear brethren, to be possessed of every heavenly virtue, if we wish you to be animated to the practice of every good work, we are persuaded that the love of Christ in his dying for

for you, will be the most powerful incitement. A lively sense of this, will produce that gratitude of heart, which will be more operative than the most cogent philosophical reasonings, to stir you up to activity in the way of holiness, or the most awful threatenings to deter you from the contrary.

We do not mean, that exhortations to duty are superseded by the doctrine for which we plead ; or that it is unnecessary to instruct, to caution, to warn and admonish the followers of Christ, with respect to their conduct ; what we mean is, that the love and grace of the Redeemer manifested in his dying for us, are the most powerful inducements to practical holiness. The grace of God which bringeth salvation---teacheth us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. Would we be excited to unfeigned and active love to the Author of our salvation ? We love him because he first loved us. Would we be excited to ingenuous sorrow for sin ? While we look to him whom we have pierced we mourn after a godly sort. Nothing is so likely to break the stony heart, and to melt the ice within us to evangelical repentance, as a view of a suffering Saviour, wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Would we be induced to a thorough renunciation of every false way ? No motive is so effectual to divorce our affections from the abominations to which we have formerly cleaved, and turn our feet from every evil way, as the powerful persuasion that Christ died for us, that we being dead unto sin should live unto righteousness. Would we be induced to practice all that is comprehended in the duties of benevolence, kindness, charity and brotherly love ? No persuasive so endearing as the kindness and love of God our Saviour. Walk in love as Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us. When we are exhorted to relative duties, it is in the same stile. As the church is subject unto Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it. When we are urged to an entire devotedness to God, we are told, that we are not our own, but bought with a price, and therefore, should glorify God in our bodies and spirits which are his ; that we should live, not to ourselves, but to him that died for us and rose again.

Talk they of morals, O thou bleeding love
The grand morality is love of thee.
Here strongest motives sting,
Here sacred violence assaults the soul,
And nothing but compulsion is forborn.

The cross of Christ is then the spring of true holiness ; the incentive to every virtue. Jesus died to redeem us from all iniquity, to purify us to himself, and make us zealous of good works. What are
naked

naked instructions, what are abstract reasonings, in comparison with the astonishing love of our dying Lord? It invites us, it urges us, it constrains us to all holiness, that we may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. May his love be ever warmly impressed on our hearts! May we live by that faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us, which is an ever active principle of chearful and grateful obedience!

THE END.

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